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***BLM hearing planned on use of helicopters
in gathering wild horses***

The Bureau of Land Management will conduct a public hearing on the use of helicopters and motor vehicles for the purpose of gathering wild horses from BLM-administered lands in Wyoming and part of Montana.

The hearing will be held at the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area Visitor Center, in Lovell, Wyo., on Thurs., June 26, from 7 to 9 p.m. The Billings Field Office and Wyoming State Office are hosting the session.

In the case of Montana, the Billings Field Office has proposed wild horse gathering operations in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. These will begin sometime after July 7, and continue periodically through Sept. 30.

Although a specific gather schedule has not been set by the Wyoming BLM State Office, the agency would like to conduct gathers in various herd management areas from July 15 through April 15 next year. The gathers in Wyoming will be based on priority needs, and the public will be notified in advance when horses will be gathered in a particular herd management area.

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The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act provides for the removal of excess wild horses from public land and the use of aircraft and motor vehicles in all phases of the administration of the Act. The BLM has been using helicopters as a tool to gather wild horses since 1976, and is required to hold a public hearing once a year to inform the public about its use of helicopters and motorized vehicles in gathering horses.

Montana completed an environmental assessment, and wild horse gather and removal plan for the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range earlier this year. Copies are available by contacting the Billings Field Office, or can be found on its web site:

www.mt.blm.gov/bifo/whb/doc2.html.

Wyoming has also completed EAs and gather and removal plans for herds in the Rock Springs and Rawlins field office areas. These are available by contacting the BLM in Rock Springs at 307-352-0256, or in Rawlins at 307-328-4200. These documents are also online at www.wy.blm.gov/wildhorses/docs.html.

For further information or to provide comments on the use of helicopters in wild horse gather operations, contact Brian Waldron, BLM wild horse and burro specialist at 307-775-6161, or Montana BLM State Wild Horse and Burro Specialist Linda Coates-Markle, 406-896-5013. Comments can also be sent to: BLM Wyoming State Office, 5353 Yellowstone Road, Cheyenne, WY 82009, or via e-mail at state_office_wymail@blm.gov.